

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR AERONAUTICS

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WHAT RETARDS AIR TRANSPORT?

By Edward P. Warner,
Professor of Aeronautics,
Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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Examination of the figures for the London-Paris air route for the present season, that being the only route for which records are published each week, is rather discouraging. Despite the elaborate preparations made for handling a large traffic this summer, one new company having entered the field and all of the old ones having increased their equipment, the total business done is actually a little less than last year's. This is the first season which has not shown a decided increase in traffic over the preceding year.

The failure to increase the traffic as was expected has not come without reason, and it is very important that the reason be found in order that it may be removed. A search for the reason, however, leads to the conviction that no one factor can be held responsible but that many causes are acting together, and these possible causes must so far as possible be eliminated one by one.

Inquiry among the London passenger agents specializing in air transport bookings and among the representatives of the transport companies themselves brings forth certain causes with great unanimity. The first, to which most of those consulted are disposed to attach major importance, is a change of policy by American tourists, on whom the air lines have largely depended for their support. It is the general belief that fewer Americans are visiting England

* Taken from Christian Science Monitor, August 7, 1922.

than in any preceding year since the war, most of the tourists landing at Cherbourg and travelling extensively on the Continent. Unfortunately, statistics on the number of Americans landing at the various ports do not become available for several months, and the theory can neither be proved or disproved at present. If it is correct the traffic will pick up strongly in the latter part of the summer, as most of the Americans who land at Cherbourg or Havre, visit England before returning to the United States, and a fair percentage of them should cross to the British Isles by air.

Loss of an Exploit.

Another possible source of the decrease in traffic, allied to the one just mentioned, is the loss in interest in air travel as an exploit. Many of the Americans who are in Europe this summer were there either last year or the year before as well and made an air journey simply to see what it was like. Having had the experience once, they do not care to repeat it as an experience, although they would be glad to use air transport if they were really pressed for time. Furthermore, many of those who are visiting Europe for the first time since the war, have flown in America and will not go out of their way to make a flight simply for the sake of flying.

Although it may cause air transport undertakings to suffer temporarily, it is not altogether regrettable that tourist traffic of the sort just mentioned should be falling off. Air transport is a serious business, and it will be much easier to win recognition

for it as such when the number of travellers who use it merely as a new stunt has decreased.

Another undoubted handicap to air travel this spring has been the occurrence of two bad accidents. Accidents happen, to be sure, with all types of transportation, but there is no alternative to the railroad or steamer as a rule, while those vehicles themselves are always available as alternatives to the airplane. All travel agencies agree that every airplane accident reported in the press, even though very slight, produces a sharp temporary drop in the bookings for travel by air.

The Demand for Reliability.

Finally there is a cause of trouble which is seldom mentioned by those in the business, but which is of undoubted importance, and that is lack of perfect reliability. The regularity of some of the services is extremely good now, but it is still inferior to that of the railroad, and it must be still further improved. The man who takes an airplane because he is really in a hurry, and he is the traveller to whom air transport must make its permanent appeal, demands virtually absolute certainty of delivery at his destination. For example, it is much easier to get tourists to travel from Cherbourg to Paris by air than in the reverse direction, because if anything goes wrong on the trip to the port it may mean losing the ship on which passage has been bought. All the effort of operating officials and technical staffs should be centered on improved safety and reliability, and the traffic will then take care of itself. Reliability of service does not necessarily re-

quire any radically new developments, although some improved means of navigating in fog would be much appreciated. It requires above all things the careful maintenance of the equipment in order that forced landings may be avoided. What can be done in that direction is shown by the record of an English company which made 84 air journeys between London and Paris in June without a single forced landing, and the reward of care is indicated by the way in which what traffic there is, is flocking to the lines having the best and most consistent operating records.

The British Air Ministry has promulgated a rule forbidding the passenger in commercial aircraft to sit beside the pilot. It will no longer be possible for a favored passenger to ride outside, and even to seize the opportunity to get a brief flying lesson, as some of them have been able to do in the past. The regulation is a wise one, and should be copied elsewhere where aerial regulations are in force, for there always exists the possibility of a passenger getting excited and interfering with the controls or with the pilot. If the companies are forbidden to carry a passenger beside the pilot, too, and are therefore unable to gain any revenue from that seat, they are far more likely to fill the place with a reserve pilot than they would be otherwise. Several of the European air lines already make it a practice to carry two pilots on every flight.

The King's Cup Race.

The air race for the King's Cup, to take place early this fall, is to be an aerial tour of the British Isles, lasting two days.

This is a very interesting and valuable type of competition, and it is to be hoped that something on similar lines, but on an even larger scale, may be carried out in America in the near future. A few aerial tours were held in America before the war, and a number of great international races took place in Europe, but there have been none since 1918. These tours should preferably be arranged to last about five days, and should be so planned as to lay emphasis on reliability and economy rather than on pure speed. They have the dual advantage of leading to the development of more reliable commercial and sporting airplanes and of providing an interesting form of sporting competition for the private owner, who will never be attracted by contests for speed alone between airplanes with unlimited power.

French Gliding Entries.

The entries for the French glider meet closed on July 15, and the final tabulation shows 49 names inscribed. Four of the competitors are Swiss, one American (the Aeronautical Engineering Society of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology), one Belgian, and all the remainder are French. The most striking point about the entry list is the large number of well-known airplane factories and aeronautical pioneers that are represented, such famous names as those of Louis Paulhan, the first European to give a public airplane exhibition in the United States, and Henry Farman, who was building airplanes and making records with them as long ago as 1908, appearing among the 49. It is evident that the best aeronautical engineer-

ing talent in France is being concentrated on the problem of soaring flight, and the results obtained there, as well as in the simultaneous German competition, should be of the greatest interest.

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